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**For Immediate Release**

**U.S. Forest Service Deputy Chief Speaks with Back Country Horsemen of America**

By Sarah Wynne Jackson

Back Country Horsemen of America, the leading organization in preserving your right to ride on public lands, held their annual board meeting at Fort Worden State Park, Port Townsend, Washington. One very welcomed presenter was Joel Holtrop, U.S. Forest Service Deputy Chief, highly respected by the public, his colleagues, and Back Country Horsemen of America. Over the years, BCHA has enjoyed a good working relationship with Holtrop and the U.S. Forest Service that continues to strengthen as they share concerns, ideas, and goals.

**Relationship is Key**

Holtrop opened his speech by expressing his gratitude to Back Country Horsemen of America. He said, “I want to tell you how much I appreciate how you’ve been working with us. Thanks to you and your leadership, we have a relationship that is key.” He added that now is the time to continue developing that good relationship so we can all move forward in a positive way toward achieving our goals for enjoying America’s wilderness lands.

**Holtrop’s Equestrian Experience**

He explained that he’s no stranger to traveling in the back country on horseback. “I was Forest Supervisor on the Flathead National Forest in Montana from 1990 to 1996, and I [oversaw] a lion’s share of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Part of my responsibility was about 90 horses and mules.

“That’s one aspect [of that job] that I look back on fondly – the many pack trips I took, the many times I was out on horseback interacting with visitors, volunteers working on trails, hunters, and outfitters,” he continued.

Those days are so special to him that he has photos in his Washington, D.C., office commemorating them. “I have a couple of special pictures. One is a pack train in the mountains; I’m pretty sure it’s in Wyoming. Another one is of me on horseback, leading a mule across the South Fork of the Flathead [River] in the middle of the Bob Marshall

Wilderness. That picture is located such that when I look out my window, I have to look over it to see the Washington Monument and the White House.

“That photo reminds me of the reason we exist as an agency,” Holtrop said. “It’s because of the work that’s done on the ground level. We don’t exist as an agency because of the work that I do in Washington, D.C. We exist as an agency because of the work of forest supervisors, forest rangers, resource users, district rangers, trail managers, and people who work with trails organizations (like Back Country Horsemen of America). I don’t ever want to lose sight of that in my work in Washington, D.C.”

### **Listening and Learning**

Holtrop touched on the U.S. Forest Service trail classification issue, commending Back Country Horsemen of America for their actions in trying to make the new regulations less restricting for pack and saddle stock users. “If your intention was, as our intention was, to make sure we hear from horsemen on the trail classification issue, you were successful,” he said to thundering applause.

He also mentioned the listening session of last fall in Missoula, Montana, at Clearwater National Forest, which BCHA arranged. He said, “That was a powerful few days. It was attended by many quiet trails groups like the American Hiking Society, Blue Ribbon Coalition, International Mountain Bicycling Association, and, of course, Back Country Horsemen of America. We spent a day looking at the new trail classification standards and [how they would effect] different trails; ATV trails, mountain biking trails, hiking trails, and we spent a day looking at horseback trails.

He pointed out BCHA’s pivotal role in attaining this meeting that brought about unprecedented communication and mutual appreciation among various trail users. “That was a very successful event. I thank BCHA for helping pull that event together and recognizing that that would be a powerful way to bring user groups together in an effective setting to help the Forest Service understand your concerns and the things we need to pay attention to,” he said. “It also helped the different user groups understand each others’ needs and interests on the trail system.”

### **Our Work is Essential for the Future**

In discussing sustainability and ensuring that upcoming generations enjoy the same world we do, Holtrop said, “People aren’t as connected to the natural world today as they used to be. One of the things the Forest Service needs to do as an agency and we need to do as a society, is to find ways to keep people connected to their natural world. [Because of this] the work we’re engaged in with all of you is not only important to us, it is critical to us. We will not accomplish our overall mission without the work we do with you, Back Country Horsemen of America. I very much appreciate working with you all.”

### **Caring About America’s Places**

Holtrop closed his talk with gratitude and encouragement. “One reason I’m glad I’m here today is because it gives me the opportunity to publicly say ‘Thank you’ to all of you for the work you’ve been doing in ranger districts across the country and for establishing a good working relationship between your organization and ours. I’m delighted with the progress we’ve made in our relationship in the last several years and I’m delighted with the work we can get done because of that.

“Thanks for caring about the places that I care a great deal about,” he said. “It will make a difference for many generations to come. There’s much work to be done and there’s a need to do that work in a way that shows the American public why that work is important. I know I can count on Back Country Horsemen of America to do that.”

### **Partnering to Preserve**

Back Country Horsemen of America thanks U.S. Forest Service Deputy Chief Joel Holtrop for taking time out of his busy schedule to attend their annual national board meeting this year. BCHA officers and members enjoyed getting to know him and discussing common interests and ideas. They also appreciate his efforts in hearing the voice of horsemen and in solidifying the good working relationship they share. BCHA looks forward to preserving our nation’s equestrian heritage for years to come through their partnership with the U.S. Forest Service.

### **About Back Country Horsemen of America**

BCHA is a non-profit corporation made up of state organizations, affiliates, and at large members. Their efforts have brought about positive changes in regards to the use of horses and stock in the wilderness and public lands.

If you want to know more about Back Country Horsemen of America or become a member, visit their website: [www.backcountryhorse.com](http://www.backcountryhorse.com), call 888-893-5161, or write PO Box 1367, Graham, WA 98338-1367. The future of horse use on public lands is in our hands!

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